

BERTIE'S INDECISION

By Ida Wright Hanson

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Martha's eyes were troubled as she hung up the receiver.

"Just like Bertie," she mused, taking up her coat, cap and goggles and going slowly up the stairs. "Exactly like Bertie. This morning we were to spend our last afternoon sailing; at noon time he sent a messenger to say he had changed his mind and would come in his automobile; now he telephones that we will go on our wheels to the redwoods."

"Unstable as water, but handsome as a king—ought to be," was her thought a few minutes later. They were walking down the garden path to the bicycles waiting at the gate.

"Here's a dower for you," he said gayly, stooping to pick a petal from a flower.

"Fitting symbol of you is this Martha Washington. Not a bit high toned, but smiling alike on the rich and the poor; delicately colored, but sturdy for all that, my Martha."

She responded absently to his chatter. She was glad he did not seem to expect much of her in the way of conversation.

"I suppose you have been wondering why I changed my mind so often."

They had walked up hills and wheeled down them and over the level places and along the cool shady path to the redwoods. They were sitting where a streamlet leaped forward to kiss the feet of the ferns; where the redwoods gave out a soothing fragrance. A few steps away was garish sunshine, but here shade and coolness and quiet. Martha's troubled heart lightened, and she smiled winsomely into Bertie's face.

"Why?" she queried.

"Because I am going to ask you something, and I wanted to choose the best place for it. This is the best of all, isn't it, beloved? I want you to marry me, Martha, tonight and go away with me or not go away. I don't know that I care anything about seeing New York, anyway."

"You want me to marry you tonight for fear that by Christmas or September or tomorrow you might change your mind? Thanks for the compliment, and no, thank you, for the offer."

Bertie's face was white. She was savagely glad she had hurt him. He might realize a little of her suffering.

"Do you think I want a husband who changes his mind on a subject as many times as there are hours in a day? What pleasure is there in you, Bertie Harrison, and what confidence can one have? We were to read to improve our minds. You began with William Tell at the arrow scene; then you took a chapter in 'Merchant of Venice'; next you thought Burton Holmes' travels."

"Don't, Martha," Bertie interrupted. "Probably I shall thank you some time, but just now I can't stand any more than a homeopathic dose."

If Bertie had got furious with her or if he had cried—she felt as if she would not have been surprised to see him cry like a girl—she could have kept on pelting him with her sharp words, but to have him quiet and white—that was something she could not bear. Tears dropped on the Martha Washington in her cold hand.

"Forgive me, dear; I didn't mean"—

"Pardon me, Martha; I think you meant exactly what you said. In the flash of your words I see what I wonder I have failed to discover heretofore. Isn't there a saying that if you can properly diagnose a case the cure is half effected? If I overcome the fault and make a man of myself may I expect your favor, Martha?"

She shook her head.

"I can't have any faith in you, Bertie, but after all you are not to blame. You can't be different. There are too many odds against you. It's hereditary. My father knew your father well. Gemini is your birth sign—two forces pulling in opposite directions. Then your fortune stands in your way and even your name. You can never expect a Napoleon or a Bertie."

"Can any good come out of Nazareth?" he said bitterly. "But you remember the best did come out of Nazareth. If you cared for me"—

"I care, Bertie, if that's any consolation. I could wait years for you, but"—

"Well, that's enough. Bertie threw up his cap and caught it as it came down. The red came back into his smooth cheeks. "Now I will fare forth into the world and show you what a man's will can do in spite of heredity and astrology and all the rest. You'll see, Maid Martha."

This sudden change of spirit was so like variable Bertie that Martha sighed.

"I'm sorry I can't encourage you."

It was a year before news came from the absent Bertie. Martha might have inquired from his friends in her own city, but she was too proud. He had turned from her as lightly, as easily, as he had always flitted from one phase of life to another—a butterfly, she thought scornfully. Why should she waste tears on him? So she spent her days among her flowers and books, and if her nights were not always peaceful she gave no sign.

At the year's end a thick packet came to her. With nervous, trembling haste she tore off string and paper and brought forth Bertie's diary.

"And to think I doubted him," she sobbed as she found her name on every page.

He had taken with him to New York \$100 of his fortune, pledging himself not to touch another penny of it till a year had gone. He had sought service

immediately, beginning with the most menial tasks. How his sensitive nature loathed them none knew better than Martha. He had kept at each employment till he found something a step higher.

At the end of four months he discovered a friend of his father, who offered him a clerkship and gave him freely all the information he needed. It was when he was established in this that he had made his code of rules.

After office hours a two hour walk, dinner, then study till 11, his bedtime. This was not to be varied for six days. Sundays were to be free.

"I am beginning," he wrote, "on Macaulay's history. I swear not to take up anything else till these volumes are finished."

"Can he be strong enough, the dear, brave boy?" Martha wondered as she read eagerly on, but it was when she was smiling over some whimsical, happy thought, written in Bertie's happy expression, that it came.

"Failed!" on a dozen pages. Then one bore bravely a line from Goldsmith. "Our greatest glory consists not in never failing, but in rising every time we fail."

After that was the continuation of the arduous routine. On the last page he had written, "If I do not win my Martha after all, I feel that I shall come somewhat nearer to deserving her!"

Another six months dragged by. The diary contained no clue to his address save New York city, so that Martha could not send him encouragement and loving messages of which her heart was full. She felt that she deserved the suspense, but it was fearfully hard to bear. When it seemed to her that she could endure it no longer, an ominous yellow envelope came to her.

"Bart Harrison seriously ill in B. hospital; constantly calling Martha."

Even in her distress Martha noticed "Bart," not "Bertie," mute tribute to his winning battle against birth signs, heredity and fortune.

Less than a week later Martha sat trembling in the office of B. hospital while a sweet faced nurse talked to give her time to regain her control.

"It was 'Martha, Martha, Martha,' till Mr. Dean, his employer, decided to look through his belongings for a possible clue. We found your name and address and ventured to telegraph. He is rational now, but naturally extremely weak. You may see him, but not for long."

"How did he get the fever?" Martha quavered.

"Overwork. Mr. Dean saw that he was doing too much, but his advice was not heeded. Mr. Harrison would reply that in six months he would take a vacation. Then came the great storm. Mr. Dean warned him, but he would walk for two hours, no matter what the weather. Of dogged persistency to an idea Mr. Dean said he never saw his equal."

The nurse's keen eyes saw that Martha's trembling lips had grown quiet, and she answered the smile in her wet eyes cheerily.

But when at last Martha was by her lover's side she was the weaker of the two.

"I felt all day that you were coming, dear," he said quietly. "You have waited for me, haven't you?"

Fiercely restrained sobs choked back her answer, but she laid her head on Bertie's pillow, and he was content. Next day they awaited the coming of the minister with prayer book and ring.

Seventeenth Century Panegyrics. George II. inquired why Milton did not write his "Paradise Lost" in prose. One sympathizes more with Stephen Duck, the peasant poet, who read the great epic over "twice or thrice with a dictionary before he could understand the language." We find ourselves somewhat at a loss to understand the language in which were couched the fulsome panegyrics of the late seventeenth century. Dr. Hill selects two which it would be hard to surpass. The first is Dryden's to Roscommon:

How with sweet Orinda's guest he pleased to hear His fame augmented by a British peer!

Can't go almost farther in the second and blasphemy a good deal farther. It is Halifax's lament for Charles II.:

In Charles, so good a man and king, we see A double image of the Deity. Oh, had he more resembled this! Oh, why Was he not still more like and could not die?

This seems unsurpassable. Yet if Dr. Hill had been concerned with the poems of Mr. Richard Duke he would doubtless have secured an almost equally startling couplet in memory of a monarch whose wit has been more often extolled than his virtues:

Good Titus could, but Charles could never say Of all his royal life he lost a day.

—Professor W. P. Trent in Forum.

His Ambition. A new vicar was being shown round the parish by his warden.

"The natives are a hardy lot, sir," he said, "but you haven't seen Peter Sparks. He's the quaintest character in these parts."

This individual turned out to be the sexton, and he was discovered ringing the church bell.

"Is not this bell ringing almost too much for you, my friend?" asked the vicar sympathetically, noting the bent figure of the old man. "You must be a great age!"

"Yesir, yesir," mumbled the old fellow. "Ow many years I've tolled the bell I can't tell ye, but it's beginning to tell on me. Owscever, I've tolled the bell for five vicars."

"Dear me!" ejaculated the clergyman uncomfortably.

"And," continued the sexton, "I'll be happy when I've made up the 'alf dozen. I shan't I'll retire then!"—Glasgow Times.

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audited and stated by the Surrogate and the
parties for settlement to the Orphans' Court of
the County of Essex, on Tuesday, the thirty-
first day of July next.

Dated June 11, 1906. JOHN C. KENT,
EDWIN B. GOODSELL, Executor.

Notice of Settlement.
Notice is hereby given that the accounts of
the subscriber, administrator of Abram G.
Yarwood, deceased, will be audited and stated
by the Surrogate and reported for settlement
to the Orphans' Court of the County of Essex,
on Tuesday, the 31st day of July next.

Dated June 1, 1906. SYLVANUS COCKEFAIR,
EDWIN A. RAYNER, Executor.

ESTATE OF SETH COOK COMPTON.
Pursuant to the order of GEORGE H. BUSELL,
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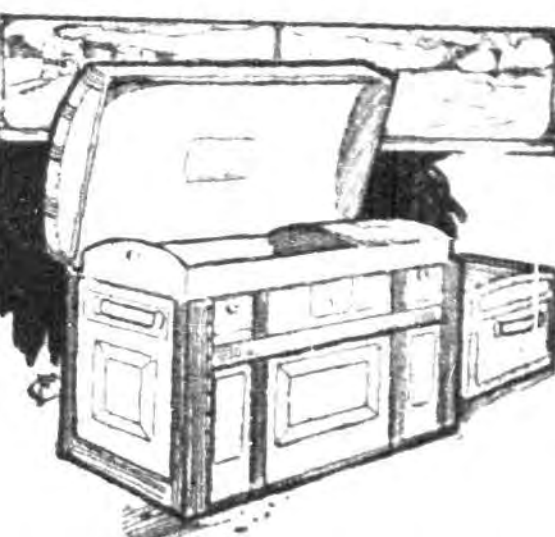
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